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ARTICLE IV.

REMINISCENCES OF ATONEMENT THEORY.

BY PROFESSOR GEORGE MOOAR, S. T. D.

FIFTY years ago, a boy born in Andover, schooled in Phillips Academy, whose pastor was a trustee of the seminary, to whose eyes the faces and forms of the Professors Woods and Stuart had been familiar, could hardly pass his minority without thinking of the assertion that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. All the more, if, because of close family connection with the biographer of Edward Payson, he had felt the evangelical passion of that fervid preacher; or if, in odd moments of a Sunday, he had been wont to turn over the pages of some volume of the *Panoplist* containing accounts of the events which accompanied the sundering of old ties in the churches of the Puritan fathers.

Nor would his interest in this topic be lessened on being transferred for his college course to a Berkshire valley. For in that county Jonathan Edwards had written some of his seed-thoughts, and Samuel Hopkins had been his near neighbor. Stephen West, who had succeeded Edwards, had continued for nearly sixty years pastor in Stockbridge, had been an influential trustee of Williams College, and had written one of the earliest and best treatises on the Atonement. Edward Dorr Griffin, who also composed an elaborate discussion on the same topic, had presided over the college during those very years in which Mark Hopkins and his brother Albert, natives of Stockbridge, were taking their college course. These brothers were of the Hopkinsian blood. Great as became the formative in-

fluence of the elder of these brothers over the intellectual life of his students, the immediate personal power as respects religion was at this time swayed by Professor Albert Hopkins.

Scientist he was, and in no small degree a practical pioneer in his department, but his sense of religion was amazingly pungent, persistent, and constraining. In marrying a daughter of Dr. Payson, herself a woman of marked gifts, he might almost have been said to do so by some elective affinity with her father. Certainly the evangelical passion which had been felt in reading the memoirs, now, under the influence of this professor, deepened into the positive Christian purpose. For he was capable of presenting the theme of salvation in very vivid terms. For one example may be recalled a sermon from these words:—

“ Who is this that cometh from Edom,
With crimsoned garments from Bozrah?
This that is glorious in apparel,
Marching in the greatness of his strength?
I that speak in righteousness,
Mighty to save.”

Respecting the correctness of the exegesis, or the order of thought in unfolding the picture, little impression remains; but the picture itself, of a Redeemer who maintained, at personal cost, authority in behalf of his redeemed, never faded from my imagination. Who would put the chief problems thus raised in the forms of the clearer understanding?

In the fall of 1848, there was heard at Andover the third in the series of discourses afterwards published under the title of “God in Christ.” That was on Dogma and Spirit. The second, on Atonement, had been given to the Divinity School in Cambridge a few weeks before, and had whetted the appetite. The appetite for these topics was usually eager in that locality. Just then the eagerness was more tense. The village church—in which seven years after I

was to be ordained—was full that afternoon. You could feel pricking the ears the solicitous expectancy occasioned by the Cambridge utterance. Well might there be solitude. For the speaker's utterance was in his own mind no mere fulfillment of an academic appointment. In February previous, "the view expressed in these discourses had come to him, not as something reasoned out, but as an inspiration from the mind of God." And he spoke as one charged with such message. The impression on one hearer at least was profound, one of those exalting impressions which make a boy feel somewhat as Peter felt on the Mount—perhaps a little dazed withal. It would have been a swift impulse to offer a tabernacle for a longer sojourn on this high vista.

Hardly two years subsequent, Professor Edwards A. Park, who in 1847 had exchanged the chair of Rhetoric for that of Dogmatic, preached the Convention Sermon, entitled "The Theology of the Intellect and that of the Feelings." It was of this sermon that Dr. George E. Ellis, the Unitarian editor, wrote: "We trust all our readers have perused that convention discourse of the Andover professor. . . . We regard it, on the score of what it boldly affirms and of what it so significantly implies, when taken in connection with its wonderful beauty of style and its marvelous subtlety of analysis, as the most noteworthy contribution which orthodoxy has made to the literature of New England for the last half century." Such an address could not fail of challenging the pen of the chief theologian at Princeton. It led to a continued and, what seemed to us youngsters at least, a matchless sword-play. Although the principal issues did not concern the Atonement, still the discourse had been specially directed to "those who admit the atoning death as the organic principle of their faith." In the first annotation appended to the published pamphlet containing it, there is a careful statement of one

of the chief defensive points in the special New England theory: "Yet the Atonement has such a relation to the whole moral government of God as to make it consistent with the honor of his legislative and retributive justice to save all men and to make it essential to the highest honor of his benevolence or general justice to renew and save some."

Ere this discussion over the Convention Sermon was fully finished there appeared on the scene another man capable of provoking earnest searching of heart. In 1853 William G. T. Shedd, who in the same year had brought out his edition of Coleridge with an appreciative introduction, came to take charge of the department of History. He was in the vigor of youth, but there was no lack of maturity. He brought from his philosophical training at Burlington the characteristic admiration of the more spiritual philosophy understood to prevail there. He did not continue closely to follow Coleridge in his theological constructions. Or, if he did in some degree, it was more and more to take the right road back to Augustine, and for him that road went through Edwards and Calvin. For when he took a road he loved the bee-line. It was he who, when the doctrine taught in the Middle lecture-room was apt to be stigmatized as Pelagian, had the boldness to publish a paper whose very title was, for that latitude, a trifle other than courageous, Sin a Nature, and that Nature Guilt. Nor did he qualify guilt as mere liability to punishment. In his succession as preacher, he once preached a sermon in which the Atonement was declared to be a satisfaction to the ethical nature of God and man. A paper with this title appeared in the *BIBLIOTHECA SACRA* some time after.¹ The moral sentiment in Dr. Shedd was singularly spiritual. The divine attribute which kindled his adoration was Justice, pure and simple. If he did prefix any adjective, it

¹ Vol. xvi. (1859) pp. 723-763.

was not likely to be "public" or "rectoral." He did not disuse love, but with him it connoted holiness. He was fond of affirming that the Divine Being may be merciful; he must be just. The impression not unlikely to be made on some who heard him may be exhibited in the words used by one who afterwards became a noted lecturer in Boston, but who was at this time a pupil in the Academy. He likened this preaching to "a living, red-hot coal of God's almighty wrath." One would need to tone down this description; and wrath, as ordinarily used, would not represent the tone or the manner of the preacher. But in that early utterance in the pulpit, there would be sentences, and sometimes periods, in which there was intense heat, even if the heat were still and white. What he had to say about expiation—and that was not an unwelcome word to him—appeared to come from some deeper insight. According to that insight, sin had struck in its influence far into the being of God, and therefore the provision for its remission must come from as far. The sacrifice on Calvary did come from the infinite depth. The same ethical nature in man needed to be appeased. The cross did appease it. For He that knew no sin was made sin, and suffered accordingly for his redeemed. "Whosoever is granted this clear, crystalline vision of the Atonement will die in peace."

Meanwhile, however, the writings of the Broad-church men were passing over to America. In 1854 appeared the theological essays of Maurice. The weight of popular and ecclesiastical interest in them came to turn upon the hope of restoration for all men which was given expression. But that hope runs back to the fact of an atonement, and involves some definite conception of the nature of that provision. It will be remembered that one chief reason why our New England divines had been zealous to restate the atoning provision as they did, was to prevent the unlimited feature of it—which they were equally zealous to maintain

—being used to favor the inference of universal salvation. These essays, and other products of what might be called the Maurice circle, took the left road from Coleridge in respect to the work of the Saviour. So with Stanley and Kingsley and especially with Robertson, whose sermons just then gained a wide attention. How eagerly they were read! For he would put what he had to say in an unaffected, simple, and straight way, with no absence of a certain subdued literary charm. What was in him to say was humane, and had come there through the throes of a mind that loved truth and had borne a cross.

These were the years in which it was appointed us to be learning directly on this theme from the lectures of the Abbot professor, and from renowned discourses which were delivered by him, and from books and articles by his pen. If any of us were in danger of being beguiled in either of the directions just named, he might correct our undue admiration by his wholesome habit of closer definition and strict logic. For that consistent theory, which he had compendiously stated in a note of his Convention Sermon, he was now setting forth with minutest distinctions of thought and of terms, in order to anticipate and forefend the erroneous inferences which had been associated with less-guarded statements of the same general scheme of doctrine. It was his conviction that this discriminating view preserved and illuminated the truth which divines of diverse schools had meant to maintain. If he were thought by any to be quite willing to expose the weak and tender points in other current constructions of doctrine, if he could do it with rare facility and humor, still he was honest as well as clever in the endeavor to show that unity might be reached on his theory, as he would word it, between thinkers who were now very much at war. The very chair he held and the constitution and history of the Seminary were a continual spur to this endeavor. Was

not the institution a compromise from the beginning? Were not the very phases of the creed tender to the foot of the teachers who stood upon them? If he needed to be conciliatory, there was no small temptation to being adroit, and there has never been any doubt among those who knew him that he could be adroit.

It seemed, too, as if he were providentially raised up to complete the doctrinal edifice on which the builders of earlier generations had labored. He seemed called, as he was remarkably gifted, to be not only the theologian by eminence of the new divinity, but its historian and biographer. But there were likely to be other students of that story who might be pleasantly—possibly sometimes not quite that—surprised to see how the fathers had been able by anticipation to express themselves in the deft distinctions of our lecture-room. Yet, as you read or pondered, you kept noting how greatly this prophetic anticipation on their part was to their intellectual credit. For now the elder prophets were put in new honor among their own children. Their theory of the Atonement, being now felicitously worded, might more than ever justify the name, the Consistent Theory. The very word recalls the allusion which was made in one of the notes in the Convention Discourse to that notable contemporaneous essayist, who, when accused by a brother-clergyman of inconsistency with himself, smiled a very broad smile, as if that could be a reproach on account of which a seer need blush. Elsewhere than in Concord, and among those who loved orthodoxy too, there continued to be men to whom this particular consistency which our professor rated so high, did not seem to be the prime jewel.

Much as he made of these careful verbal definitions in stating the reconciliation of God with men, he was eminently skillful in presenting that doctrine in its large and impressive practical bearings. But that was done rather

in the pulpit than the lecture-room. Mr. Joseph Cook only states the fact when he says: "Nothing moved him so irresistibly, or with an awe and an adoration so startlingly contagious, as did the supreme topic of the Vicarious Atonement, or that revealed arrangement in the Divine Government by which the demands of Justice and Mercy are reconciled through the voluntary sacrificial sufferings of Christ substituted for the punishment righteously due to sinners against Infinite Holiness." One has only to refer to Sermons II and III in the volume of "Discourses on some Theological Doctrines" to feel the force of this declaration. In fact, as I copy this passage just as the devoted admirer had it printed, with capital letters beginning several of the great words, the feeling comes over me that the theory of the Atonement would have gained in larger degree the impressiveness which belongs to it if the fundamental ideas for which those great words stand had received more uniformly their proper and commanding emphasis. They often did receive this on those signal occasions when this master of assemblies rose to the height of his central theme. I have seldom long forgotten that anecdote of the negro who habitually attended on the ministry of one of the Edwardeans, that one, too, who was among the earliest to define the theory we are now considering. Some other minister had come in the place of the deceased. It was natural to compare the two: "Massa Bellamy, he make God so great, so great!"

This ability to magnify the elementary ideas on which any theory rests is especially necessary in such a case as this, where so much turns on the word "Government"—the governmental theory. For that word may be written with a small initial letter. The Atonement that is bound up with it will be correspondingly meager. The state may be conceived of as a convenience, an expedient simply, or even, as by the anarchist, a usurpation. To be told that

considerations analogous to reasons of state—the minimized state, too—called for the sacrifice of the Saviour does not compel awe and adoration. The sense of law must be more profound, as with Hooker,—“resident in the bosom of God.” This high ethical conception of the reign of law, borne to us in the speech of Psalmist and Prophet, was invested with more solemn meaning when fulfilled in the Messianic King. “Thou sayest I am King; to this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world.” Biblical theology recognizes this as the characteristic and ascendant thought in the Gospels. But it is hard for our modern democratic and socialistic mind to keep the height of it.

If such a reductive process has been growing of more recent years in any quarter, it had not impaired yet the tone of the Edwardean theology. With the masters of our New England thinking, the Divine Government was an uppermost theme. Dr. N. W. Taylor, whose work at New Haven continued down to 1858, had spent the greater part of his life in magnifying it. “It,” says President Porter, “occupied his mind more than any and every other subject.” When, therefore, he and others urged that the voluntary sacrifice of the Saviour maintained the authority of the moral government in an extraordinary way and degree, they felt sure they were very near the quick of the problem. Their confidence was apparently justified by the fruits in the revivals that followed. For, from the days of Griffin and Beecher and Finney, wherever this type of the great proclamation was presented, the kingdom of heaven suffered a violence good to see. The ground that had been lost under the old lapse to Unitarianism was surprisingly recovered at many points. Let the years 1830-31 witness. As late, too, as 1857-59, preaching after the methods of the ascendant teaching had lost none of its distinctive power. It “promised,” said Dr. Park that very

year, 1859, "to become the prevailing view of evangelical thinkers." And the solemn years that were soon to follow in the war for the government of the Union might have been expected to confirm the promise.

Nevertheless, in the very heart of Connecticut, close to the home of its more conservative school of theology, Dr. Bushnell in 1856, still more fully in 1866 and 1874, unfolded his different interpretation, laying his principal stress upon the convincing, persuasive elements in the work of the Saviour. Yet the persuasiveness with him was no mere good-naturedness. It had a tonic quality, and much of it. Forgiveness was "no plausible indifference in the guise of grace." What he himself called his "three rugged chapters" were his tribute to the historic doctrine which he was often thought to be doing away. The very "sacred altar-forms," the usual inferences from which he had ruled out, he devoted another chapter to show that "we cannot afford to lose": "for they fill an office which nothing else can fill."

This tribute was to be rendered in yet more express terms. For he was moved, after a sabbath of years, actually to displace chapters embracing three hundred and fifty pages, replacing them by others in which, as he writes, "I now assert a real propitiation of God, finding it in evidence from the propitiation which we instinctively make ourselves when we forgive." Indeed, why might he not have used himself the very same title that Dr. Shedd had employed—an ethical satisfaction to the nature of God and man? For was it not this common ethical nature which stirred those "indignations" which inhibited the free and glad outflow of mercy, which outflow was to be realized only by some overt act of sacrifice in the mission of the beloved Son? In setting forth the current theory, its advocates had been wont to make frequent use of the word "abhorrence." Punishment was intended to show the feeling in God indicated

by that word. The death of Christ was intended to show the same feeling, and even more intensely. Evidently the very word was abhorrent to Dr. Bushnell's taste. Still, the feeling indicated by it is almost precisely the one which, according to this new vision of the truth, God needed to overcome, in order to forgive. There is in God's nature an "organic recoil against sin," and he must go out in special benevolent deed to discharge his "revulsions." It need not surprise us, perhaps, that Dr. Bushnell's latest and admiring biographer should this last year have expressed the query,—to use no stronger word,—whether it would not have been quite as well to have stopped before those rugged chapters began. Still, it was here at least that the Hartford divine showed his larger appreciation of the problem with which he was dealing. There had been moral theories before his day. If he had felt their truth, he had also felt their shortcoming.

Some time before the final second part of "Vicarious Sacrifice" appeared, a very fresh, thoughtful, and spiritual monograph on the same topic had arrested local attention in Scotland. It had also received sympathetic appreciation from the Maurice circle in England. The distinguishing contribution of the author, the Rev. J. McLeod Campbell, consisted in the supposition that Christ offered in the sinful world's behalf an adequate repentance. It was a pleasure and also a confirmation in his mind, that Jonathan Edwards had long before suggested such an alternative. It might have been expected that the attitude of Bushnell would be hospitable. It was so. He characterized the book as "pure, sweet, fragrant with celestial unction." Yet the distinctive element in it was treated with hardly more cordiality by him than it was at Andover, where it received a generous, if also a briefly critical, notice. The indebtedness to Edwards which Campbell had acknowledged was itself a large recommendation there.

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Plainly, however, this side of the Saviour's service for sinners was winning a large place in the convictions or preferences of many. In 1850, when the ecclesiastical associations about Hartford began to be much stirred up over the divergences of the pastor of the North Church in that city, one of the *Independent* staff—and we early subscribers to that journal were wont to think that the editors spoke with no little authority in those days—wrote that there was really no need of a panic. For “he has no party,—no adherents that we know.” A quarter-century later this could not be said as to the adherents, however fit to affirm as to the panic. The Moral Influence Theory, as it had been more fully unfolded, had made its way. Not infrequently it had reconciled to the churches of the fathers some souls that otherwise might have found that atmosphere hard to breathe. In other cases in which the older forms of doctrinal statement were still dear, it had touched springs of imagination and devout feeling at some lower depth.

Despite all this, the new views must run the perils of their excellences as well as of their defects. The original title of Vicarious Sacrifice gave full place to the immediately appended words, “grounded in principles of universal obligation.” That is, for God to enter into humanity for its salvation was only common duty. If the Father so loved the world that he gave the only beloved Son, this was “no superlative—no over-good kind of goodness.” Doubtless, the controlling reason for putting this so was to avoid the notion that this sacrifice was so mysteriously unique as to be altogether unknowable; wholly unlike any experience of which ordinary beings are capable. No; the Atonement is intelligible: the love that originated it is like that which has spent itself in devotion for us by our cradle and fireside ever since we came into being. Now this representation, true, truism possibly as it is, might be over-

wrought and overworked. It may be uttered in such a mood and tone as to be an irreverent half-truth. The Master, for instance, said of the Mary who poured the ointment, She has done what she could. Nevertheless, the world would, he predicted, never cease to speak of it as an exceptional service. Nor could we so much as think comfortably of the Master addressing to her such a question as this, Doth he thank the servant because she did the things she ought to have done? Let it be supposed that in some sense this could be said by the Master concerning any or all human service and obligation, is it equally fit for men to employ the same language toward the Most High? One need not hesitate to plead, Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? but that he is now or ever has been under obligation to render the extraordinary humiliation of Calvary, is not an assertion identical. There is still room for a Paul to speak of a love which passeth knowledge. There are two aspects, even, of common duty: one in which, after the servants have done it, they say, We are unprofitable; the other, in which we who look on cannot refrain from recalling the ode:—

"Yet thou dost wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace,
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face."

Let us note another marked characteristic in the discussion of this theme by those who have evidently felt the influence of the Bushnell volumes. It is the disposition to go far back of the crucifixion which the Gospels make so prominent. The theologians who had gone before had been wont to magnify that event, to concentrate the value of the Redeemer's service on the hour when he said, It is finished. But the response was natural. The value was not in that hour of suffering, but in that holy obedience that went before. Why, indeed, should it be confined

even to the temporal history of the Master? The virtue lay in the Incarnation. So Campbell had laid stress on Christ's identification with the race by his birth. Articles and treatises many have followed in this vein,—such as those of Canon Gore. The title which Dr. Simon gave to one of his books is significant, "Reconciliation by Incarnation." In Scotland, Dr. Orr, in "The Christian View of the World as Centering in the Incarnation," recognizes the same trend. In our own country, Dr. A. H. Strong carries the matter still farther. For he recalls a great day in his mental life when he saw "the natural union of Christ with all men which preceded the Incarnation." This vision has stayed by him, and stirred him deeply. "The race began to be by virtue of a Kenosis of the Logos which antedated the incarnation." "Not late in human history did he vicariously take our sins upon him, but from the very instant of the Fall." But obviously thoughts may not stop at that point. Must not he have borne the sin of the race in the anticipation of it before it began to be? Bushnell had not hesitated to answer affirmatively. "So along down through the smoke of Ages, why not say the eternities, he has been joyously enduring the contradiction of sinners against himself." Let us be thankful that the adverb lights up the sentence!

Now, however interesting, fascinating, or even plausible may be such retrocession from the bare wood of the tree on which our Lord hung on a certain day of a definite year, one must feel some fresh sympathy with those mediæval disputants concerning predestination who appealed to John Scotus and were told that to God "there was nothing future, because he expects nothing, and nothing past, because to him nothing transient." Is there not danger that in placing the bearing of sin at so great a height, doubt might begin to arise whether this sin-bearing be such an out-and-out event as makes it of real meaning and power to

us creatures of time and sense? Is it not gnostic over-much? Although he came in real flesh and blood, yet it might seem, after all, as if that were only an incident. For it may be remembered that Dr. Bushnell spent a few months in California, by no means a visit unimportant. Still in the totality of his career as a thinker, few, unless they were early Californians, would give that visit a paramount place. Was the actual passion of the cross similarly immaterial in the whole of the Saviour's mission? I well recall a Scotus-like scholar, afterwards president of the University, who had been a classmate of Dr. Bushnell. He was fond of that old friend's saying, that there was a cross in the heart of God before the Son became flesh and dwelt among us. He would repeat it with due reverence, and his listener would receive it with some measure of awe. For whatever more or other that bold figure might suggest, it meant one great truth for us both; that God is eternally and essentially Love.

But does that meaning carry with it the idea of eternal atonement? That title was given—and the sound of it remained with me—in a volume of sermons once delivered by Professor Roswell D. Hitchcock. It seems to have remained with another reader, Dr. W. N. Clarke. For in the winsome pages which he devotes in his "Outlines" to this topic, "If we chose," he says, "to employ the word 'atonement,' eternal atonement was made, and is made, in the heart of God." But this author follows the current which had set in before, to disuse, and be shy of, the nomenclature of the past systems. God is placed before us as the great sin-bearer. He bears a double burden: first, in enduring what he hates; and, second, of endeavor to save. He has carried this burden all the long ages, and still carries it. The hatred of sin, and love for those who were involved in it, could not remain unexpressed. Here comes in now one technical word at least, that had played a large

part in most orthodox discussion, so-called. That word is "satisfaction." The great sin-bearing heart expresses itself in Christ, and only so is satisfied. To be sure, pains is taken to say, that God does not deal through Christ in the character of lawgiver or judge, but "in his real character as God; as his own self in personal relations with his creatures as their very selves." But the question may well be asked, whether God can appear in his real character irrespective of his relation to the human race as its sovereign. He is not merely one spirit in a universe of spirits. That would be the dream of Pluralism without the reality of him in whom all creatures live, move, and have their being. In fact, if we must think of God as the chief sin-bearer, that must be for the very reason that the government is on his shoulders. An American philosopher of well-deserved repute, whose point of view closely resembles that which we are now noticing, and whose practice in logic can prick the infirmities of some judicial and rectoral reasoning on this topic, nevertheless, uses the following language: "It was an awful responsibility that was taken when our human race was launched with its fearful possibilities of good and evil; God thereby put himself under infinite obligation to care for his human family."¹ But this infinite obligation devolved upon him, not merely because he has a family which is large and complicated, and is a real Father, but because that Fatherhood, while it holds in its bosom all that belongs with the highest and dearest idea of home, nevertheless, is great by what it surpasses as well as by what it holds in common. If the obligation incurred was startling, the reconciliation as described in the Scriptures was startling also. If, notwithstanding the darkness of the sinful problem, we may still hear some child singing "All's well in the world," it is because God was "on the throne" in the very moment and the very act

in which the beloved Son completed at Jerusalem the passion for which he was sent. Whatever may, either inadequately or transcendently, be true and treasured in the conception of a God eternally in pain over the sin and guilt of his own creatures, the succession of believing people must rest their hopes on that which was actually done in the flesh, and done therein by one who is Governor indeed. The theologian may be, and it is beautiful for him to be, at home, like St. John, in the region of pure and lofty ideas, but he reaches bed-rock in his system only as he couples close together, "That which was from the beginning," and "That which we have seen with our eyes, and our hands have handled."

These reminiscences, running down the course of Atonement Theory during fifty years, although personal, and, it might be alleged, provincial, are widely illustrative. In the instances cited is shown a prevailing trend. For it should seem that the century we have been closing has been able to look at this doctrine in some freshness, breadth, and variety of view. Some tendencies brought to sight in this retrospect have been iconoclastic as to cherished words and terms. There has been no small amount and stir of reassorting and rearranging the credal images to which men had before bowed down. But there has been restoration as well.

In 1883 the National Council of the Congregational churches requested the appointment of a commission of twenty-five to draw up a statement of doctrine which should, to use the phrase, be up to date. For this to be attempted in a body of believers in which discussion on points of faith had been often exceptionally tense, and which had been charged with disturbing other groups of Christians as well as its own, was risky. If the result were not the perfect and final success, it came as near being as reasonable minds could have expected. On the del-

icate point of the reconciling work of Christ, a comprehensive recognition of the main elements in the sacrifice was reached, and reached with only two or three declining voices. Those voices would have been glad if a particular word, "expiation," had been retained. That, in their conviction, was a landmark hazardous to allow removed. In immediate connection, an old danger, against which all the succession of Edwardean defenders had set guard, became very much alive again. Singularly, it became most alive on the very hill where the guard, it was supposed, had been made doubly sure. For the hypothesis of a probation after death was deduced as an unavoidable sequence of that unlimited atonement which the great teacher of theology had been most zealous to maintain. Was not this "the most unkindest cut" that teacher or theory could receive? But the best of tenets may be magnified out of the connections in which it properly stands. Sooner or later there will be reaction. Its one-sidedness will be seen to be its deformity.

In the later years over which this reminiscence lingers, two new movements of thought might be adduced as favoring the so-called moral theory. One is the evolutionary method as applied in the interpretation of the New Testament literature, and of the human history generally. The other is the Kantian philosophy of knowledge as applied by the Ritschlian school to Christian doctrine. The former was thought to displace the stout and towering conception of Moral Government with which the Edwardeans were wont to reason. The latter set up a gulf-like distinction between a theoretical and a practical knowledge of God, the last being the knowledge which has the substance and value. Now our fathers, who set the pattern of so much of our thinking, had felt at home in the very field which was now shut away. They had spent nights and days in surveying and mapping it. In the theory of

the atonement they had attained no small satisfaction. But in this new atmosphere, would their definitions hold?

The actual result has not been more disastrous than was apprehended. Evolution has been in due time hospitably received and worked by those who would make it utter itself with a Christian accent. Even the Ritschlian distinction has often proved itself grateful to the Christian experience. If those who were most partial to the distinction made concessions here and there perilous to the structures of evangelical faith, yet it was wonderful how much of them was left standing, and that the dwellers therein lived in so much peace and power. The members of the last International Council, for example, were surprised to hear an English minister, generally supposed to be well versed in the Ritschlian modes of statement, speak to them of the work of the Redeemer in terms which since 1884 had become almost archaic. The seat of authority for mankind was placed by this speaker on the very cross on which the lowly Master had bowed himself to die. It is "only a deep expiatory view that invests Christ with this final moral claim." In the recently published volume by one of the chief contributors to this Review, who has himself often and lucidly discussed this topic, he has quoted the no less positive tone in which Kaftan, another thinker of this school, has expressed himself. Referring to some modern theologians who had returned to the old doctrine, but who had said, not the juridical idea of punishment, but the ethical idea of propitiation, is to be made the basis, Kaftan affirms, "On the contrary, the highest ethical idea of propitiation is just that of punishment. . . . Precisely the idea of the vicarious suffering of punishment is the idea which must in some way be brought to a full expression for the sake of the ethical consciousness."¹ Even Professor Harnack, although he might be cited as in the main inclining

¹ F. H. Foster, *Christian Life and Theology*, p. 234.

away strongly from dogmatic formula, and preferring to think of what our Lord did as the loving service which constrains, yet allows himself the following language: "There is an inner law which compels the sinner to look upon God as a wrathful judge. This conception is false, and yet it is not false. For it is a necessary consequence of his godlessness. The Holy One descends and serves and dies, and then they believe that God is Love." False, and yet not false! It often seems as if theory here, as elsewhere, is a perpetually recurrent adjustment of partial truth or a perpetually recurrent elimination of partial error. It is true that God is not a wrathful judge, that is, an unjust judge. But he is judge in the highest and broadest conception. The analogies of the ordinary court-room or of the ordinary throne may come far short of fully representing him with whom we have to do. That is no less true of other analogies, that of fatherhood and sonship, for example. They are all only approximate helpers to our better apprehension. None of them are to be set aside as of no value. At some stages of our personal or of our general human progress, they may seem outworn. But then again they may get a new depth of meaning. "The commonplace truth" in them may be "restored to its first, uncommon luster."